

Acculturation and Ethnicity in Consumer Behavior

The concepts Acculturation and ethnicity are often used by the researcher to describe consumption experiences of ethnic minority consumers. This paper presents a review of the relationship between cultural process, specifically what has been termed Acculturation, and how it helps to understand consumer behavior of ethnic minority consumers. Consumer Acculturation is a socialization process in which an immigrant, or marginalizes consumer learns the behavior, attitude and values of a culture that are different from those of their culture of origin (Lee 1998). Ethnic groups are "any group which is defined or set off by race, religion, or national origin, or some combination of these categories," (Gordon, 1964, p.27). Historically Acculturation has been primarily shown as a one-way process where the micro-culture adopts the dominant culture's norms without corresponding influences. This paper looks for explain the impact of acculturation on consumer purchase decisions of ethnic minority group and how it helps to understand consumer behavior of ethnic minority group.

INTRODUCTION:

Minority ethnic audience in all over the world represents a significant cultural and consumer force. Increasing ethnic and cultural diversity- like other forms of social change – represents both a threat and an opportunity to marketers. New consumer segment can provide fresh sources of top-line growth with focused new product development to the marketer. And for that producer has to be aware of the cultural change among the ethnic minority consumer. Acculturation provides a qualitative overview of how cultural differences of the larger minority ethnic communities affect their consumer behavior.

Acculturation and Ethnicity in Consumer Behavior:

Acculturation and Assimilation:

Redfield, Linton and Herskovits (1936, p.149)) define acculturation as ' those phenomena which result when group of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent change in the organizational culture patterns of either or both groups". Under this definition, acculturation is to be distinguished from culture-change, of which it is but one aspect, and assimilation, which is at times a phase of acculturation. Acculturation is a process of adopting the believes and behavior of one culture group by another cultural group. The direction of adaptation can be a minority group adopting habits and language patterns of the dominant group, and can be other way- that is, the dominant group also adopt patterns typical of the minority group. The changes may take place in dominant culture, the subculture or both groups, according

to Berry (1977); in practice Acculturation tends to produce more substantial change in one of the groups. Assimilation of one culture group into another may be evidence by changes in language preference, adoption of common attitude and values, membership in common social groups, and loss of the separate political or ethnic identity.

Many researchers have used the term acculturation and assimilation interchangeably, or in some case, the meaning has overlapped (Gordon 1964). To ass to the confusion, different disciplines use the terms to mean different concepts (Berry and Annis 1974; Padilla 1980). For example, sociologists like Gordon (1964), typically use the term "assimilation" to describe encounters between ethnic groups and the cultural negotiation process to find common ground. In contrast anthropologists prefer the term "acculturation" to describe the same cultural negotiation process (Gordon 1964). A review of the consumer acculturation literature reveals a similar inconsistency. Therefore, it is important to relay the predominant difference between assimilation and acculturation in terms of their usage in the consumer acculturation context and the next outcome of the cultural negotiations. While assimilation occurs when an immigrant fully adopts mainstream values and gives up their cultural heritage, acculturation can occur when some elements of the mainstream culture and added without abandoning the native culture (Berry 1980; Padilla 1980; Wallendorf and Reilly 1983; Jun, Ball et al 1993; Rossman 1994).

Consumer Acculturation:

Consumer Acculturation is a subset of acculturation and socialization. While acculturation is more general, consumer acculturation is specific to the consumption process. Consumer acculturation can be seen as a socialization process in which an immigrant consumer learns the behaviors, attitude and values of a culture that are different from their culture of origin (Lee 1988). Webster (1994) views ethnic identity as a subset of acculturation and assimilation as a mode of acculturation. In the Webster's study, ethnic identification is operationalised by determining which language is used in the home. Webster believes the combination of the ethnic identification and self-identification captures assimilation dimensions. Laroche, Kim and Tomiuk (1998) state that the primary different between the two constructs is that ethnic identity measures focus on maintenance/retention of the culture of origin and acculturation measures focus on acquisition of the host culture.

Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity:

Although closely related, ethnicity and ethnic identity are two separate constructs. Ethnicity is an objective description and refers to a group with common national or religious background. In contrast, ethnic identity is more subjective (Cohen 1978;

Hirschman 1981; Minor 1992) and is a self-designation which relays a person's commitment and strength of association to a particular group (Zaff, Blount, Philips and Cohen 2002; Chung and Fischer 1999). The concept of acculturation refers to a process or change. Ethnic identity, on the other hand, refers to a status, which may or may not be static. Thus the strength of ethnic identity may influence the level of acculturation as suggested by Penazola and Gilly (1999) and others. The contrasts of the ethnic identity and acculturation are neither parallel nor opposite of each other; rather they influence and shape each other.

Measurement of Acculturation Constructs:

Measures of acculturation typically attempt to determine the extent which a person has adopted to a new culture (Magana et al 1996) and the resulting behavioral changes that occurs a result of the contact (Ward and Arzu 1999). There has been a great deal of variation in the measurement of acculturation and ethnicity in both the social science and the consumer behavior literature. Some factors, either individually or in combinations, that have been considered in the measurement are language, reference groups, intermarriage, identity, culture (Laroche, Kim and Tomiuk 1998; Lee and Um 1992), and religion (Hirschman 1981). Communication based measures =, such as media usage, have also been used (O' Guinn and Faber 1985; Kim, Laroche et al. 1990).